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FROM AIT KAOHSIUNG BRANCH OFFICE

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SUBJECT: South Taiwan Races Intense but Voters Subdued

Summary

[11.](#) (SBU) On the eve of Taiwan's legislative elections, Southern Taiwan's races are intensely competitive, though most analysts predict little change in the overall Pan-Green/Pan-Blue ratio of seats here. For all but the top one or two candidates in each district, the races in much of the South remain very close, with factors such as vote allocation, vote buying and the impact of independents, making the outcomes difficult to predict. Overall voter interest is weak, however, with voter turnout expected to be low. Violence, once a regular feature of Southern Taiwan elections, has been minimal. Major rallies held in Kaohsiung City and County on December 9 featuring President Chen highlighted the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Kaohsiung Incident, but were remarkably subdued. End Summary.

Many Races Remain Too Close to Call

[13.](#) (SBU) On the eve of Taiwan's legislative elections, many Southern Taiwan races remain too close to call, particularly in Kaohsiung City (11 seats) and County (9 seats), and Tainan and Pingtung Counties (8 and 6 seats respectively). In each of these areas, only a couple candidates appear strong enough to win with comfortable margins, with the bulk of the remaining candidates all within reach of the few thousand votes likely necessary to win a seat. The impact of vote allocation arrangements, hidden vote buying, and independent candidates (who score high in name recognition, but may not necessarily do well at the polls), is unpredictable. However, most local political analysts expect the overall current balance in Southern Taiwan between Pan-Green and Pan-Blue legislative seats to change very little. Pan-Green parties currently hold 28 of the 48 seats in Southern Taiwan, or just under 60 percent.

Rallies Marked Kaohsiung Incident Anniversary

[14.](#) (SBU) Major rallies were held by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Kaohsiung County and City on December 9. The rallies featured President Chen and other key DPP figures, including Premier Yu Hsi-kun, Kaohsiung Mayor Frank Hsieh, DPP Secretary General Chang Chun-hsiung, and Presidential Office Secretary General Su Tseng-chang. In Kaohsiung County,

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Chen appeared on-stage with all five of the DPP's candidates and emphasized the importance of voters allocating their votes according to their identification card numbers, to ensure all five DPP candidates would win. The two Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) candidates were not included, as the Pan-Green parties are not cooperating on vote allocation in Kaohsiung County.

[15.](#) (SBU) In Kaohsiung City, a march and rally on December 9 highlighted the 25th anniversary of the Kaohsiung Incident. Attendance at the march was extremely low and, as a result, it was shortened. Attendance at the evening rally was also much lower than expected. AIT/K estimates around 20,000, mostly older Pan-Green supporters, were present. The crowd responded positively to President Chen's remarks, which reiterated familiar Chen campaign themes including the call for replacing "China" with "Taiwan" in the names of state-owned enterprises and overseas representative offices, which he pledged to push provided the Pan-Green had a legislative majority.

[16.](#) (SBU) Noting that he had been proud to serve as defense counsel to the victims of the Kaohsiung

Incident, Chen urged voters to give the Pan-Green a legislative majority so Taiwan could continue its march toward democracy. With a legislative majority, Chen said, he would move to put into place a constitution by 2008 suitable for Taiwan's situation. Chen also pledged to establish a Taiwan National Human Rights Commission, a National Human Rights Hall and a Taiwan Truth Investigation Committee. The latter, Chen implied, would investigate events during KMT rule in which dissidents were mistreated, including the Kaohsiung Incident.

17. (SBU) Overall, participants were not nearly as enthusiastic as in similar rallies held earlier this year for the Presidential election. Surprisingly, a significant number of participants actually stood up and left in the middle of President Chen's remarks, due to the late hour.

Campaigning Intense, But Violence Minimal

18. (SBU) Although the close races in many parts of the South have given a frenetic pace to some of the candidates' campaigns, there have been almost no clashes between supporters of opposing sides. One exception was in Pingtung County on December 9, when a People-first Party (PFP) candidate led supporters to the local DPP headquarters to protest remarks by a DPP candidate. Some pushing and shoving between protestors and Pan-Green supporters occurred, but police equipped with riot gear kept the two sides apart mostly. There were a few injuries, but the incident did not last long. Despite this and a few other confrontations that involved yelling between supporters of opposing candidates, there is no indication that any major violence is likely to occur.

Low Voter Turnout Expected

19. (SBU) Overall, the races in Southern Taiwan, even though intensely competitive, do not appear to have fired up the voters. A common theme AIT/K has heard in discussions with local political officials and voters throughout the South is that there is little public interest and enthusiasm in this election, outside of core campaign workers. Weariness from the presidential campaign and its aftermath earlier this year is a major factor. Also, the low public opinion of the legislature is also playing a role; a just-released Gallup/Transparency International poll showed 63 percent of Taiwan voters consider the Taiwan legislature as the institution most influenced by corruption. None of the local party officials or political analysts AIT met expected voter turnout in this election to exceed 65 percent, and in many areas expected it to be closer to 60 percent.

Comment - Another Vigorous Taiwan Election

110. (SBU) The intensely-waged campaigns underway in Southern Taiwan for tomorrow's legislative election demonstrate again the vitality of Taiwan's democracy. The lack of violence, once common in hotly-contested Taiwan elections in the South, is notable. It may reflect a maturing of the democratic process here, with election campaigns being seen more and more as a regular, routine part of political life. On the other hand, it may also be a result of the general lower level of interest and enthusiasm local voters have demonstrated toward this year's legislative campaigns.

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